

From Stephen F. Austin

Letter from Austin in Prison in Mexico

Austin went to Mexico to present the petitions of the Convention of 1833 to the Mexican government. Although his trip was successful, the government intercepted an angry letter he had sent. On his way home he was arrested, sent back to Mexico City, and imprisoned.

10 May 1834

Dr BROTHER.

I improve the first moment that I could write to you since I arrived here which was on the 13 Feby—on that day I was locked up in one of the dungeons of this vast building *incommunicado*, that is I was not allowed to speak to, or communicate with any person whatever except the officer of the guard. I remained in this situation until yesterday when I was permitted to communicate with persons outside, receive books, writing materials, visits etc and to mix with the other prisoners—there are about 60 of them, all officers except two clergymen (Padres) and all men of good families and respectability confined for political opinions in the revolution of the past year. . . .

My room is about 16 feet by 13—very high ceiling—two doors, one flush with the outside surface of the wall, the other near the inside surface and within the wall, which is about 3 feet thick of large hewn stone—the latter door has an oblong hole large enough to admit a plate—the other is solid, both were always locked and bolted until yesterday. . . .

When I came in each dungeon had its occupant and all were *incommunicado* the same as myself. All the doors were locked and bolted . . . We saw each other but could not salute or speak. . . .

Since the Independence this building has been used as a prison for political opinions or offenses¹—no one accused of felonious crimes² is confined here. The prisoners are well treated. . . .

It is very evident that Texas must become a state at some future day and not very distant—all will be in favor of it—the attempt that has been made was premature and totally wrong as to the manner. . . .

I have no idea when I shall be at liberty. . . . It is much in my favor that all remains quiet in Texas. . . . I have never complained of the Vice President Farias—he has been deceived—he has been made to believe, as I am told, that my object was to separate Texas from Mexico and deliver it to the United States of the north, which is absolutely false and without the shadow of foundation besides being a great absurdity.³ In a moment of irritation I said to the vice President that if the evils of Texas were not remedied⁴ the public there would remedy them of themselves—this irritated him very much and my difficulties commenced.⁵ The truth is I lost patience and was imprudent⁶ and of course to blame, for patience is necessary in such cases. . . . My conscience is at rest—as an agent I did my duty, or, only erred from excess of zeal⁷ to do it—good has resulted even from that error if it was one. I am suffering but the evils of Texas are remedied—this idea consoles me for my misfortunes and enables me to bear them firmly. . . .

S. F. Austin

Review Questions

1. What kinds of criminals are sent to this prison?
2. What goal for Texas did Vice President Farias believe Austin was working for?

Critical Thinking

3. **Analyzing** Do you think Austin is expressing his true opinions in this letter? Why or why not?
4. **Making Inferences** How do you think the Texans felt about Austin's imprisonment?

1 **offenses** errors

2 **felonious crimes** violent crimes such as murder

3 **absurdity** a joke, ridiculous

4 **remedied** corrected

5 **commenced** began

6 **imprudent** reckless

7 **zeal** eagerness